60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Weird China
Voodoo's strange gods
Rennes: secret dossier
Phantom planes
Is death a dream?

125

Aus & NZ $1.75 SA R1.75 IR 75p US $1.50

THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 11 Issue 125

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The Unexplained U.K. 60p. I.R. 75p. Aus. & N.Z. $1.75. S.A. R1.75. U.S.A. $1.50.
How to obtain copies of The Unexplained Copies are obtained by placing a regular order at your newsagent, or by taking out a subscription.
Subscription Rates
For six months (26 issues) £17.60, for one year (52 issues) £35.20. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.
Back numbers
U.K. & Eire: Back Nos are obtainable at cover price from your newsagent or from The Unexplained Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT – post free.
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A catalogue of curiosities

China, encompassing one fifth of mankind, has its fair share of mysterious happenings. PAUL SIEVEKING describes cases that came to light when, for three brief years, the veil of official censorship was lifted

Left: Zhu Xiulian, born in 1977 in Guangdong Province, has been covered in black hair since her birth. In all other respects she is a normal child, active and intelligent

FROM THE EARLY PART OF 1979, the Chinese press printed a steady stream of reports covering the whole range of strange phenomena. Like reports of any sort from that vast and largely inaccessible country, these could rarely be followed up by Western observers and are therefore open to a number of interpretations. The best we can do in assessing them is to compare them with the patterns emerging in the rest of the world.

In December 1981 the Chinese newspapers were ordered to curb their coverage of strange phenomena, particularly human freaks and prodigies. 'There is a problem with the social effects of such stories,' said an official report. There does indeed seem to have been a decrease in the volume of strange reports in 1982, so let us consider what was gleaned from the three-year period up to the official clampdown.

With a population approaching 1000 million, it is hardly surprising that all conceivable oddities of the human form occur in China. Many human freaks were reported.

The average Chinese is perhaps the least hairy individual on the planet, so the phenomenon of the hairy child is all the more unusual in China. The Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* of 10 January 1980 reported that 32 such individuals had been found in China, spread over 10 provinces. Although isolated cases had been reported over the years, it was little Yu Zhenhuan (whose name means 'shock the Universe') that made the condition famous. Western journalists have handled his story in their usual degrading fashion, calling him 'monkey-boy', 'wolf-boy', freak, mutant . . . but to the Chinese he is simply *mao hai*, a hairy child.

Yu Zhenhuan was born on 30 September 1977 in Shaotzugo People's Commune in Liaoning Province, north-east China. His parents, Yu Wenguang, 27, and Song Baoqin, 25, were horrified to find their baby covered in jet-black hair at birth: his eyebrows merged with the hair on his forehead, and his entire body except for his lips, palms, soles and the tip of his nose was hirsute. He even had hairy ears.

There was, it seems, some dispute as to whether Zhenhuan should be allowed to live, but he survived long enough to come to the attention of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and after that his future was assured. His family was given a new house and a state subsidy to look after him, and at the age of

Below: one of the most famous of Chinese hairy children, Yu Zhenhuan, born in 1977. His parents were horrified when he was born and were tempted to let him die. Now the state is helping them with his upbringing

Above: the provinces and autonomous regions of China. The stories of paranormal happenings that have come out of China originate in all parts of this vast country

eight months he starred in his first film, a documentary shot at Shenyang, the provincial capital.

By the end of 1979 his hair had turned from black to brown. It varied in length in different parts of his body: 3 inches (7 centimetres) around the shoulders, 2 inches (4.5 centimetres) on his back, 1 inch (2.5 centimetres) on his abdomen. Apart from that, he was very much a normal child. All his senses were in good working order, x-rays and intelligence tests showed nothing abnormal. He had a slightly enlarged heart, and at four to five months was taller than an average child. His head and ears were large, and he cut his teeth late, at about one year. He laughed a lot and, apart from a little trouble with a boil and eczema, was perfectly healthy. The hair parted at the side of his body and thickened towards the mid-lines of the back and abdomen, forming whirls at various places.

Zhenhuan had a sister two years older than himself, who was perfectly normal. Apart from his maternal grandfather and uncle, who had slightly hairy calves and thick beards, none of his immediate relatives showed similar traits.

All human foetuses are covered with fine down after five to six months' development, but this hair is usually shed before birth. The cause of the *mao hai* atavism apparently remains mysterious, but it has been determined that the trait is inheritable. And the hirsute individual keeps his pelt throughout his lifetime.

To balance these stories, reports of completely hairless folk began to emerge. In February 1981 the New China News Agency said that seven such people had been discovered in east China. Zhang Juling, a 10-year-old girl, was one of these. Her father said that with a magnifying glass minute hairs could be detected on her skin, 'but these hairs fall off as soon as the weather turns cold.' (One would expect that, if this were to happen, it would be when the weather turned *warm*.)

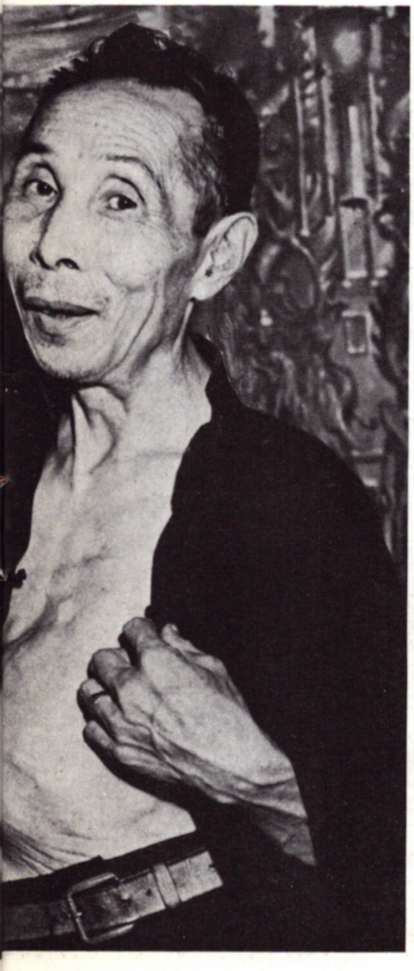
Then there were two brothers in Yunnan Province – Yang Tianzhao, 26, and Yang Tianshun, 21. Their hairlessness was accepted by their fellow villagers, simply because clean-shaven heads are a way of life in the region. Their peculiarity came to light only when a medical team carried out an investigation in the village. Though the brothers had no hair at all, not even in their nostrils, hair follicles could be seen under the skin in the pubic region and armpits, and on the scalp. The brothers seldom fell ill and they sweated normally, unlike some of the other hairless people. Their youngest brother, who died at the age of 18 months, was also hairless. But their two surviving sisters had thick black hair on their heads.

Chen Li, 15, whose address was not reported, was congenitally unable to perspire, since he lacked sweat glands and hair. In summer he bathed in rivers a dozen times a day to keep cool, and had to cover himself from head to toe with wet towels before he could fall asleep.

An unidentified boy of 15 in Shiling Commune, Jiangsu Province, was known as 'fire body'. After falling ill in 1971 he refused

Right: these two Siamese twins, Liu Sen-Ti and Liu Sen-Kai, were 64 years old when this picture was taken in the 1940s. In their prime they had made a great deal of money touring Europe and America. Now, having fallen on hard times, they were about to return to vaudeville in Nanking. Their act was a simple one: it consisted of answering questions from the audience about the details of their everyday life

Left: an 88-year-old woman, Zhao Lishi ('Madam Chow'), found herself growing small horns. It took about six months to reach the stage of development seen here. A similar condition, in which bony protrusions develop *inside* the skull, is not uncommon in elderly women



to wear any clothing, even playing naked in the snow during winter. In the previous 10 years he had not caught cold or any other illness, and was growing up normally otherwise.

Wu Xiaoli, a baby girl from Miangyang in Sichuan Province, always felt hot and went naked because she was apparently allergic to clothes; she was nicknamed 'fire baby'.

The oddest freak story from China emerged at the beginning of 1980. Zhang Ziping, 35, a deaf-mute farmer from a remote mountain village in Huize County, Yunnan Province, had his second head surgically removed. The 'parasitic' head, in some sources reported as normal-sized, but actually about 8 inches (20 centimetres) round, was growing on the right side of Zhang's face. It had hair and 12 teeth, but the eyes, eyelids, nose and mouth were not fully developed. The cranium was normally shaped and covered an egg-sized brain, which is said not to have functioned. Plastic surgery restored Zhang's face, and he was said to be looking for a wife.

A two-headed baby was born on 16 August 1980 in an army hospital in Tianjin, to unidentified parents. Weighing 7 pounds (3.3 kilograms) at birth, the baby also had two oesophaguses, two respiratory systems and two stomachs, but one heart, liver and anus. When the left hip was injected, the left head cried; when the left head was fed, the right head cried.

Two other freak births – one in China, one not – were reported around this time in the *South China Morning Post*. A baby born at the Tsan Yuk hospital, Hong Kong, had four legs and four arms. It died 13 hours after birth. And in Manila, Philippines, a boy with two heads, three feet and three hands died five hours after birth.

A surgical operation on an 88-day-old girl, carried out at Anshan in Liaoning Province on 4 December 1979 disclosed four parasitic foetuses growing in her abdomen. In total, they weighed $11\frac{1}{2}$ ounces (325 grams). The largest was 6 inches (15 centimetres) long and had well-developed hands, feet and hair.

In 1980 Lin Eryi, a 17-year-old male of Gutian County, Fujian Province, complained of difficulty in breathing and vomited blood and human hair. Diagnosing a tumour, surgeons operated and discovered a foetus, carried since birth in the thoracic cavity. Weighing more than $2\frac{1}{4}$ pounds (1 kilogram), it had underdeveloped hair, teeth and eyes.

At the age of 68 Wang Yinge of Angua County, Hebei Province, had a calcified foetus removed. It had been embedded in her abdominal cavity for 31 years. All those years ago it had burst out of the womb and entered the abdominal cavity, where it died at the age of about seven months and became calcified. It weighed 4 ounces (121 grams) and was $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches (11.5 centimetres) long.

Death of a monkey-man

According to the *Shanghai Wenhuibao* (early 1980), local scientists had exhumed and were examining the remains of Xu Yunbao, who died in a fire in 1962, aged 23. Born in Sichuan Province, Xu was entirely covered in hair and bent at the waist. His skull was only 3 inches (8 centimetres) in diameter at birth; he grew to be only 3 feet 5 inches (105 centimetres) tall. Referred to as a 'monkey-man', Xu used all four limbs for walking, refused clothing even during the winter, and preferred raw corn to cooked food. The paper denied he was either monkey or ape, but it admitted he had 'a strong wild nature and liked to catch people'. His mother, 72, his two brothers and his two sisters were still alive and apparently normal. There is a strange twist to this story, reported in the official *Guangming Daily*. The mother had apparently disappeared for 27 days in 1939, in a forest area frequented by the 'wild men', or Chinese yeti, of Hubei Province. 'She admitted she had been seized by the ape-men but denied having any relations with them,' said the paper. The clear implication was that the hairy boy was a yeti-human half-breed.

According to reports in May 1980, an old woman of 88 in Hebei Province grew two horns on the top of her head some six months previously. The larger of the horns was said to be $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 millimetres) long, yellowish brown and without feeling. An American

doctor, Martin Bruber, told the New York *Midnight Globe* that this was a case of hyperosteosis frontalis. This is a bony, tumour-like growth that normally occurs on the *inside* of the skull and is nearly always confined to elderly women, frequently suffering from diabetes or obesity. But he had never heard of a case where the horns grew on the *outside* of the skull.

The less restrained *New Thrill* of Malaysia identified the woman as 'Madam Chow' of the Chiao Ho district in Hebei Province, and said she was in normal health, not obese or diabetic. It also said that the horns grew to be 2 inches (5 centimetres) long. When both horns were that length, they started to turn downward, and allegedly came to resemble deer horns. The same newspaper mentioned an unidentified Japanese with 3-inch (7.5-centimetre) horns. And it referred to another report from China of a man with 10-inch (25-centimetre) horns, which later dropped off to leave stumps. These then started to form into an 's' shape.

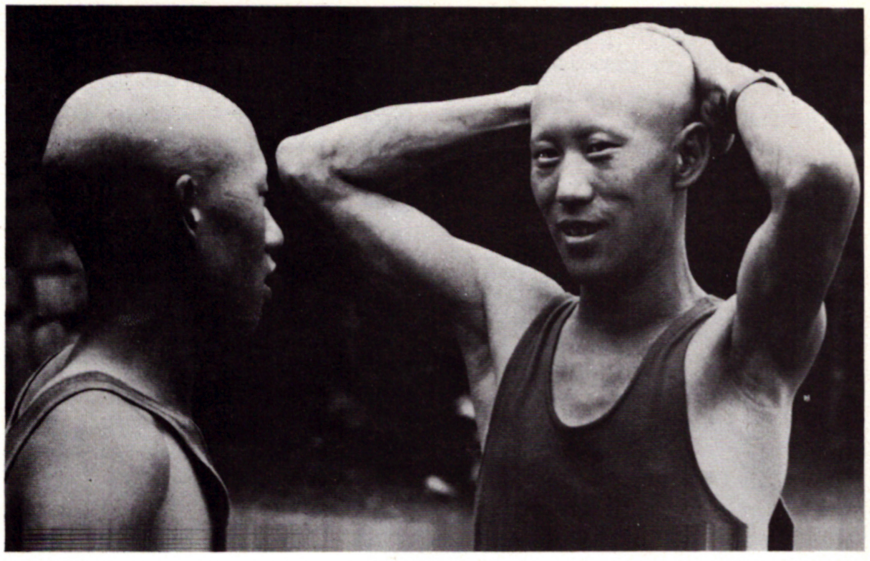
In February 1981 there were some more tantalising reports in *New Thrill*. There was a report of a five-year-old boy with a tail: he was said to be more advanced than other children of his age in many respects. Also, a Peking newspaper had gone to great lengths to debunk a reported mermaid and 'fish with legs', of which a picture (said to be a photomontage) had been circulating in Peking.

An elixir from ants

In the same month the *Shanghai Wenhuibao* carried the story of 87-year-old Yan Zhongshan, who had discovered a wondrous tonic made from ants. It seems that since 1964 he had been collecting ants, washing them in pure water, drying and grilling them and then grinding them up into powder and cooking them up in an omelette, from which he made pills. A regime of one pill a day throughout the winter had given Yan exceptionally sharp eyes and ears; and, having lost his teeth when he was 72, he had now grown a new set, strong enough to crack nuts with – or so he claimed.

Luo Shijun of Jiangxi Province, in southern China, celebrated his hundredth birthday on 12 December 1981. According to the *Shanghai Wenhuibao* (6 April 1982), he discovered one morning that 27 new teeth had grown from his previously toothless gums. An official in his village, who could not believe his eyes, gave Luo a piece of dried meat which the peasant chewed readily. There is no mention of ant pills here.

New teeth or not, some Chinese live on to a very ripe old age. A candidate for oldest Chinese emerged from the census of 1982. Lan Buping, of Guangxi Autonomous Region, was born on 13 April 1846, according to a Canton newspaper in July. He still went occasionally into the mountains to cut firewood, said the paper, and could drink 2 pints (1 litre) of rice wine at one sitting.



Above: two hairless brothers from Yunnan Province. Yang Tianzhao (right) was 26 when this picture was taken in 1980: his brother Yang Tianshun was five years younger. They lack hair completely – it does not even grow in their nostrils

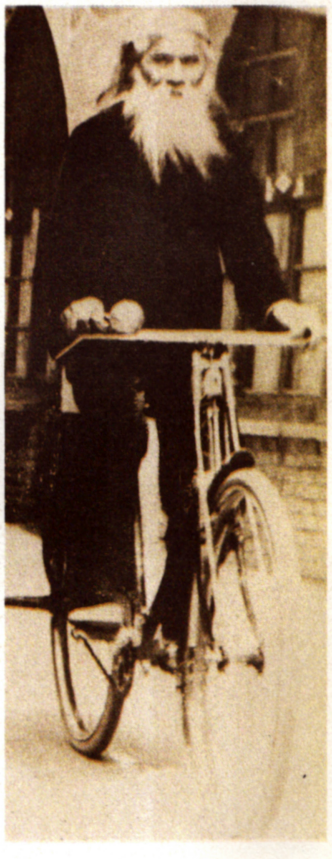
However, in September 1980 the journal *New Physical Culture* reported that an ex-Buddhist monk, Wu Yunqing of Shaanxi Province, claimed he was born in 1838, making him 142 years old. He told interviewers he had prepared wood for his coffin three times. The first two lots rotted away, and the third now served as floorboards in his room. The old man gained national celebrity, but two journalists checked local records and established he was born on 13 December 1898, making him an 82-year-old fraud.

In April 1981 the Xinhua News Agency reported two giant children. Three-year-old Jin Rui already weighed 89 pounds (40.5 kilograms) and was polishing off 2 pounds (0.9 kilograms) of food a day. He weighed almost 15 pounds (6.8 kilograms) when he was born on 23 May 1978 in Hubei Province. One month later he weighed 26 pounds (11.8 kilograms), and was eating four meals of porridge a day. The report also mentioned Liu Debiao, 6, from Jiangsu Province, who was 4 feet 9 inches (1.45 metres) tall, weighed 91 pounds (41 kilograms) and could carry a man almost twice his weight on his back.

Rounding off this sombre cabinet of curiosities is the gruesome project of Dr (or Professor) Qi Yongxiang. In December 1980 the *Shanghai Wenhuibao* stated that in 1967 a female chimpanzee had been inseminated with a man's sperm, and was three months pregnant when Red Guards smashed the laboratory and the chimpanzee died. Dr Qi, who was identified as a 'researcher in medicine' in the north-eastern city of Shenyang, was involved in the original project, and wanted to resume the experiments to create what he called a 'near-human ape'.

Having an enlarged brain and tongue, it should be able to grasp simple concepts and talk some kind of language. Organs from the monster could possibly be used as substitutes for human or artificial organs in transplants. The creature could drive a car, herd animals, guard forests and other natural resources, and be used for exploration of the seabed,

Below: Wu Yunqing became a national celebrity in 1980 when he claimed to have been born in 1838. But journalists showed that he was born 60 years later



Left: the tallest woman in the world, Zeng Jin-Lian, stood 8 feet 1 inch (2.46 metres) high. She was only 17 years old when she died of diabetes in 1982

Below: three-year-old Jin Rui of Hubei Province. Seen here at the age of 35 months, he already weighed a prodigious 89 pounds (40.5 kilograms) and was eating 2 pounds (1 kilogram) of food each day

outer space and the centre of the Earth.

Chimpanzees and humans are remarkably similar genetically. A chimp has 48 chromosomes while a human has 46. It is assumed that the only major rearrangement has been the fusion, during human evolution, of two pairs of chromosomes to produce one pair. The differences between horses and donkeys, which can mate to produce the infertile mule, are considerably greater.

Professor Neil Moore, an associate professor in the department of animal husbandry at Sydney University, commented: 'You cannot say blandly the whole thing is stupid. All one can say is that it is possible to obtain fertilisation between many species, but the chance of survival of [a man-ape] embryo is remote.'

If such a hybrid could survive, though, it would have notable advantages as a worker, according to Dr Qi: since it would be classed as an animal, there need be no qualms about killing it if necessary.

On page 2526: searching for wild men in the remote forests of China

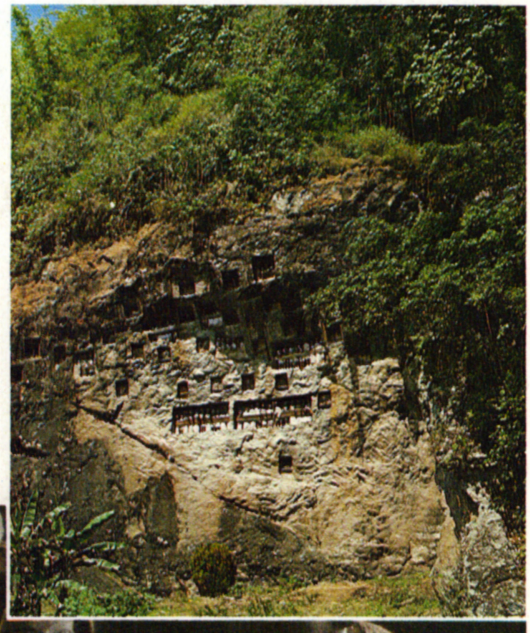
Is death a dream?

If, as materialist philosophers believe, the mind is merely a shadow of the brain, there is no possibility that consciousness survives death. But mankind has a tenacious belief in the afterlife. RUPERT SHELDRAKE asks: is this faith really justified?

THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY of mankind has always taken it for granted that some aspect of human personality survives bodily death. In many societies, ancestors are considered to live on in a rather shadowy form in a netherworld in which they can be contacted by shamans through dreams or trances. In the East, hundreds of millions of people are convinced that the core of the personality that survives bodily death comes back to this world in another physical body in the process of rebirth or reincarnation. And Muslims and Christians have generally believed in various kinds of afterlife that depend for their nature on a person's faith and their actions during their life.

By contrast, followers of the philosophy of materialism deny that any aspect of personal consciousness can survive the death of the body. They believe that the mind is nothing but an aspect, or a kind of shadow, of the activity of the brain. All mental activity must therefore cease when the brain stops functioning at the time of death. However, in spite of the fact that many educated people believe it, this theory has no persuasive logical or scientific basis (see page 2474).

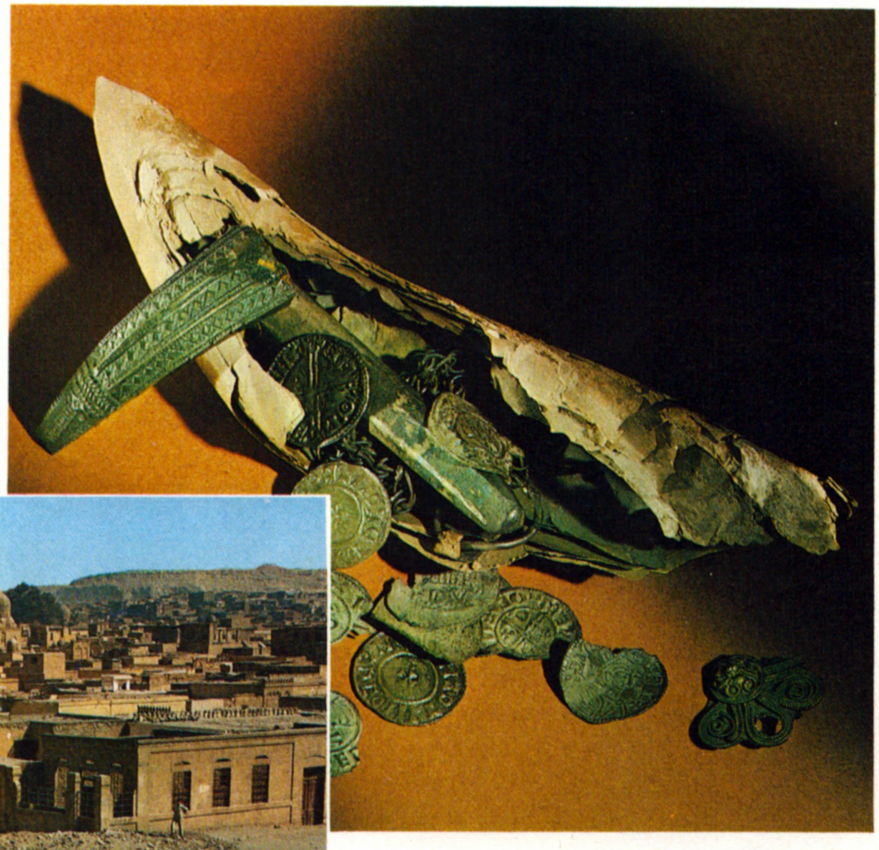
But if, in contrast to the beliefs of the materialists, there is some sort of personal survival of bodily death, what is it like? The usual answer is to say it is a life of the soul. But what is the soul? Is it, perhaps, what we



A grotto of ancestor figures overlooks growing crops at Toraja (inset) on the island of Sulawesi (formerly Celebes) in Indonesia. The inhabitants of the island believe that, in some sense, the spirits of their ancestors live on in the effigies – and that they can ensure a good harvest

normally think of as our mind? And if so, what kind of existence can the mind have without the physical body? We are so used to living in bodily form that it is almost impossible to imagine ourselves surviving without some kind of body. And yet our physical bodies will, undoubtedly, disintegrate after our death. So what is it, if anything, that survives physical death?

One answer to these questions is suggested by our experience of dreaming. In dreams, we find ourselves in all sorts of places and situations. We see and hear things, talk to people and move about. But meanwhile, our physical body is lying asleep in bed. So the body in which we find ourselves in dreams cannot be our own body:



Many ancient societies believed that dead people should be buried with useful objects that they would need in the afterlife. In the ancient Egyptian graves in the City of the Dead (above), just outside Cairo, for instance, there are extraordinary collections of household goods. And many Viking burials contain, in addition, a 'horn of plenty' (top), holding belongings precious to the dead man

it must be another body, which can conveniently be referred to as the dream body. This dream body, like our physical body in waking life, is usually taken for granted within the dream and seems real enough. Normally it is only on waking up that we realise that we were dreaming, and that the dream world and dream body we experienced were not physically real.

In order to wake up, there must be a living physical body to wake up in. But after death, of course, this is no longer possible. So we may continue to exist in a kind of dream state from which we cannot awake. In this state, the dream body will seem real, and so will the world we experience, but it will not be physical – any more than our ordinary dreams are physical.

Fascinating insights into the nature of the dream world arise in lucid dreams, within which the dreamer becomes aware that he is dreaming (see page 588). These are relatively rare, but many people have had occasional experiences of this type, for example by realising during a nightmare that the events they are experiencing are only a dream after all. However, some people have lucid dreams quite regularly and have deliberately explored them. They have found that the world they experience is usually much more realistic and consistent than in normal dreams, and sometimes almost indistinguishable from the ordinary world of waking experience. The main difference is that within lucid dreams they can do anything they like and go anywhere they like just by willing it.

Several people have described how within lucid dreams they visited their own bedroom and saw themselves asleep in bed. Here the centre of consciousness, within the dream body, is directly and explicitly experienced as separate from the physical body.

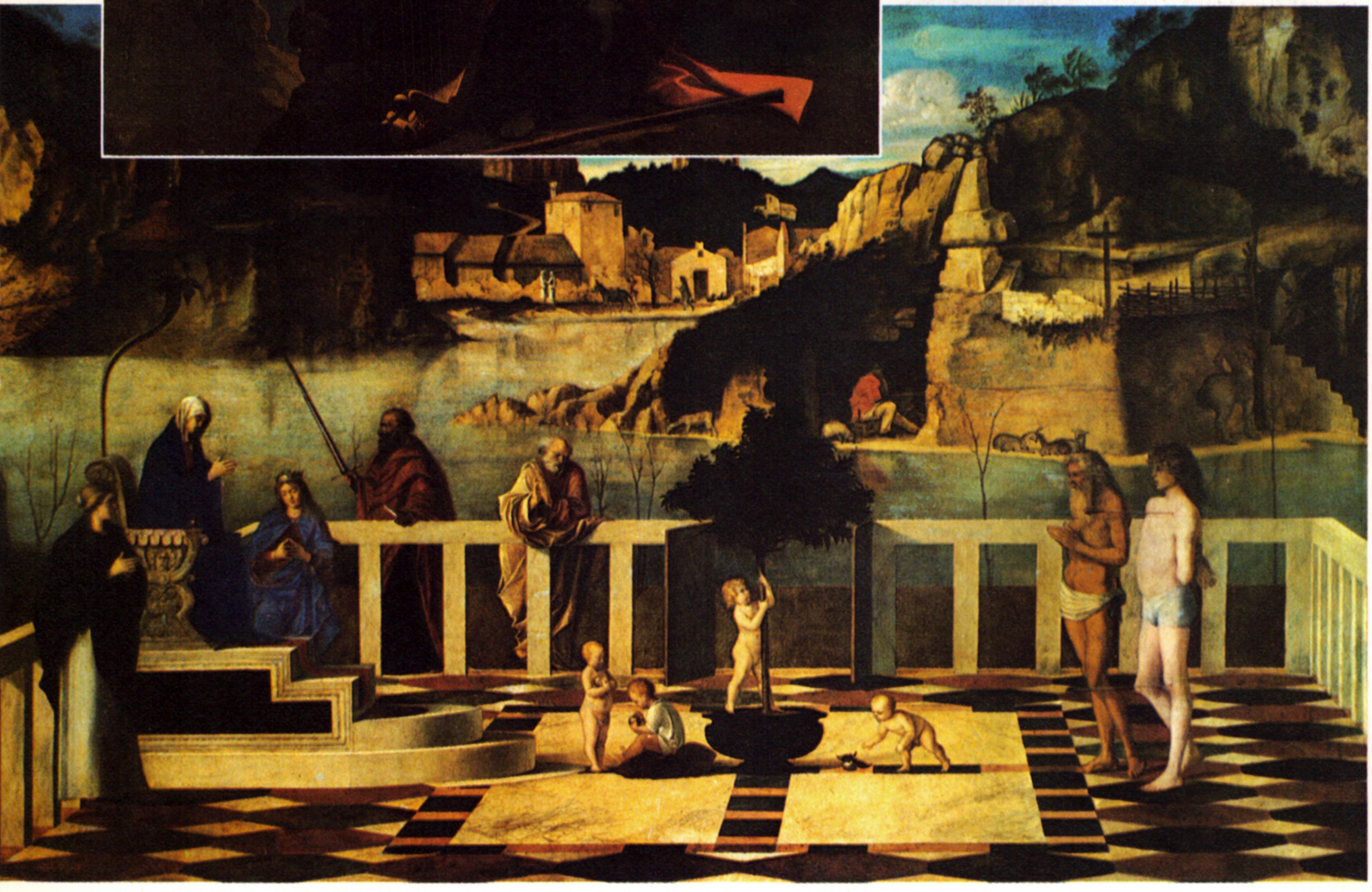
Close to death

The intriguing thing is that such states in lucid dreams seem to be almost the same as the 'out-of-the-body' experiences that are relatively common in childhood, and that may occur in adult life under unusual conditions of stress, for example when someone is close to death (see pages 101 and 1414). As in the case of lucid dreams, a number of people have cultivated the ability to travel 'out-of-the-body' more or less at will. Those who are familiar with both lucid dreams and out-of-the-body experiences have observed that they are almost identical, except for the fact that the out-of-the-body state is entered via dreams in the one case, and directly from the waking state in the other. This indicates that the centre of consciousness experienced in dreams – the dream body – and the centre of consciousness detached from the physical body in out-of-the-body experiences may be

of the same nature.

These experiences may indicate the kind of body that continues after physical death. Numerous people who have nearly died have described how they found themselves outside their physical body, for example looking down at it from somewhere near the ceiling of a hospital room. In other words, these descriptions of near-death experiences involve an out-of-the-body state; the centre of consciousness is detached from the physical body just as it is in other out-of-the-body experiences and in lucid dreams. There is no logical reason why this centre of consciousness should not continue to exist, detached from the physical body, even after the physical body has decayed. And since science has not yet begun to be able to suggest what the nature of this centre of consciousness might be, there is at present, strictly speaking, no scientific objection either.

Assuming this happens, what sort of life might be possible after death? Again, our own actual experience of the non-physical dream world may give us some suggestions. The kinds of dream we have depend on our memories, hopes, fears, desires, beliefs – in short, on our individual personality, including the unconscious mind. There is a certain amount of evidence to suggest that in dreams we may also be more open than usual to telepathic influences from others, and to



precognitions of the future. Just as our normal dreams reflect our personalities and depend on our actions and beliefs while we are awake, so the world we enter after death seems likely to depend on what we have done and believed while alive in the physical body. Some people may experience a dream-like continuation of their life before death. Some may undergo the most fantastic adventures. Others may suffer from recurrent nightmares, trapped in a hell created by their own minds. And others may experience a kind of paradise conjured up by their expectations; Muslims, for example, may tend to find themselves in green gardens with fountains, attended by dancing girls and serving boys, enjoying the pleasures vividly described in Islamic literature. Roman Catholics may encounter St Peter at the Pearly Gates. The possibilities may be limited only by the capacity of the imagination.

'From the other side'

If imagination governs the afterlife, it need not mean that we will be confined to a personal fantasy world, unable to communicate with others. Although in the absence of the physical body, normal kinds of communication through the physical senses can no longer take place, direct communication of a telepathic nature may be possible both among the departed and between the departed and the living. Some of the communications 'from the other side' picked up by spirit mediums may be of this kind; and the descriptions of *summerland* and *winterland* in such communications (see page 1050) would fit well with the idea of personal survival in a kind of dream state, as conditions here, too, are governed by the individual.

Another possibility is that the surviving personality re-enters a physical body and, as it were, wakes up again in the physical world. This taking over the body of a living person would correspond to what has traditionally been referred to as 'possession'. If the surviving personality were to become associated with an embryo or a newly born baby, then this would amount to its reincarnation.

But in addition to these possibilities, it is also conceivable that in the kind of dream-like existence after death, the personality may be open to spiritual influences coming from beyond the realm of the human mind and imagination. As in this world, such influences may lead to a progressive development of the personality, and a greater openness to the life of the spirit. Such a continued spiritual development after death would correspond to the traditional Christian idea of purgatory. This development may lead beyond our usual way of experiencing things in time and space – a mode of experience that still persists, although in a distorted form, in the dream state – and indeed beyond anything that we can imagine.

All this is inevitably a matter of speculation. We cannot find out from experience until we ourselves die. But even then, we are unlikely to obtain an objective view independent of our beliefs and expectations. For what happens to us seems very likely to depend on our own attitudes. In particular, the possibility of continued spiritual development may depend on our openness to this very possibility. If we close our minds to anything that lies beyond, we may condemn ourselves to remain trapped indefinitely within our present fears and limitations.

Left: *The dream of Ossian*, by Jean-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), shows warriors and languorous women summoned from the netherworld by the beauty of the poet's music

Right: a 16th-century Mogul Indian painting, by Ram Das, of the Emperor Babur receiving Uzbeck and Rajput envoys in his garden at Agra. It has been suggested that the nature of the world we enter after death depends upon our own expectations and experiences. For some, it may have all the luxury and comfort depicted in this painting; for others, it may be a dream-like – or nightmarish – continuation of their life before death; or it may correspond to the expectations of the afterlife given by organised religion. The nature of the afterlife, in short, is determined by the imagination of the individual

Left: an Attic kylix of around 430 BC showing Pluto and Persephone, joint rulers of Hades. It was Pluto's responsibility to supervise the trials and punishment of souls after death

Far left: the *Allegory of purgatory*, by Giovanni Bellini (*c.* 1430–1516). The foreground represents a paradise garden with the tree of knowledge in the centre. Justice and punishment are suggested by the figure with the sword

Further reading

John Beloff, *The existence of mind*, MacGibbon and Kee 1962

K.R. Popper and J.C. Eccles, *The self and its brain*, Springer International (Heidelberg) 1977

Rupert Sheldrake, *A new science of life*, Blond and Briggs 1981

Possessed by the gods

In the magical Haitian spirit religion of voodoo, the ritualistic dancing by devotees to throbbing drumbeats and rhythmic chanting can climax in an ecstatic state – in which the dancer believes he becomes a divine being.
FRANCIS KING explains

A SPECIAL INTEREST in traditional dance forms took American freelance film-maker Maya Deren to the republic of Haiti in 1947 on an assignment for *Life* magazine. It was her intention to record on film the ritual dances that are central to many voodoo ceremonies. She aimed to be a completely detached observer: her interest lay in the artistic element of the dances, not in the religion of voodoo itself.

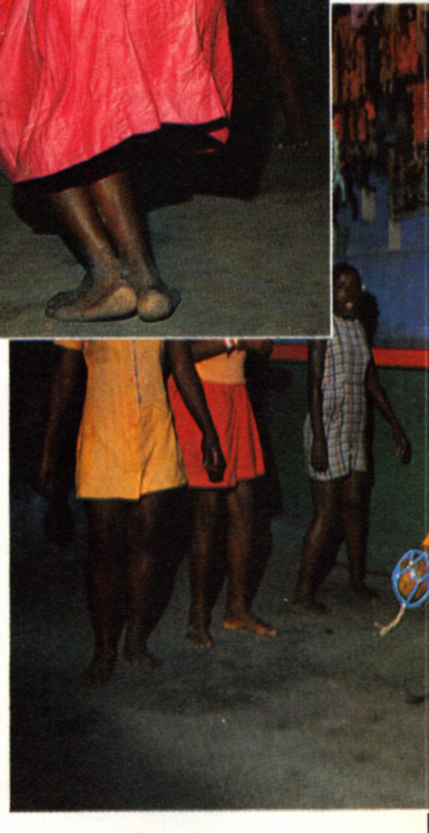
Her detachment did not last long. So strong was the power of the rituals she witnessed that her role of observer was quickly abandoned, and she was swept up into active participation in the voodoo dancing and involuntarily entered a trance-like state on more than one occasion. She seemed to be possessed by the strange voodoo goddess Erzulie (the name is of African origin) who, according to voodoo believers, blends the sexual and emotional characteristics of the pagan love goddesses Venus and Aphrodite with the compassionate and gentle characteristics of the Virgin Mary.

This synthesis of elements drawn from widely different sources is typical of voodoo, in both its religious and magical aspects. It is the magical elements that have attracted most attention from outside observers. Few Europeans remain unaware of such aspects of voodoo as zombies, the macabre walking dead (see page 1630), and the rituals of black magic aimed at bringing about the illness or death of an enemy. Practices such as these, which often involve the use of blood, semen, poisonous herbs and the remains of human bodies, are without doubt part of the darker side of Haitian voodoo.

The late François Duvalier – 'Papa Doc' – Haiti's sinister dictator, had in an earlier and more innocent phase of his life written a serious anthropological and psychiatric study of voodoo: he was also reputed to use voodoo black magic against his opponents. Whether or not this was so, there is no doubt that black magic was used against him. On one occasion his father's skeleton was stolen from its grave by anti-Duvalier sorcerers; the bones of an enemy's father are considered by voodoo magicians to be a powerful ingredient in potions designed to destroy that enemy.

But the magical element is only one aspect of voodoo. As in other Afro-American spirit religions, the central core of voodoo is a deliberately induced trance, involving the cessation of normal consciousness and the apparent possession of the devotee by one of the *loa*, the gods and goddesses of the voodoo pantheon. This possession is not confined to the priests and priestesses who have undergone long periods of training and successive initiations into the inner mysteries. In most authentic voodoo ceremonies (as distinct from carefully stage-managed shows put on for the benefit of tourists) some of those taking part in the ritual dancing do at one time or another experience the state of trance and possession.

Some of those who are seemingly in trance may of course be simulating the state: there are well-authenticated reports of 'possessed' devotees suddenly reverting to normal behaviour when confronted by an emergency. But there are equally well-authenticated accounts of Haitian peasants being spontaneously possessed by a *loa* when faced with a sudden crisis: a normally timid man might be possessed by the Haitian war-god when confronted with a rabid dog. On the whole, most voodoo possession seems to be genuine in the sense that the possessed man or woman is in a state of trance.

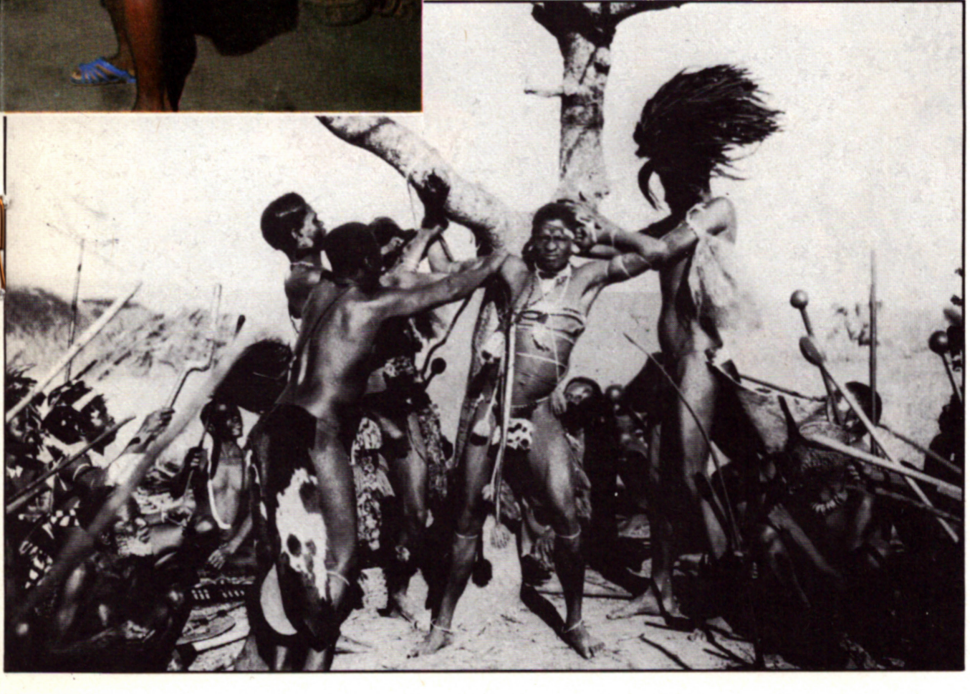


Top and above: voodoo is a potent force in modern Haiti. However, the ceremonies shown here in the capital, Port au Prince, may have been laid on merely for the benefit of tourists

Below right: voodoo drummers and singers help whip up emotions in ceremonial dancing. These three drummers, with a chorus in the background, were photographed at the time Maya Deren visited Haiti in the late 1940s

Bottom: voodoo originated in the spirit religions of Africa, which are still practised in various forms. Here an African voodoo priest casts out an evil spirit that has taken possession of a believer

In her book *Divine horsemen: the living gods of Haiti* (1953) Maya Deren gave a fascinating account of the sensations preceding her loss of consciousness and the 'seizure' of her mind and body by the goddess Erzulie. As she danced, she said, she felt a strange numbness creeping upwards through her legs, a feeling so extraordinary and unlike anything she had previously experienced that she called it 'a white darkness – its whiteness a glory and its darkness terror'. It flooded her body like a great force, threatening to burst her skin and explode her skull. Inwardly, she begged the force for mercy; in reply she heard a shrill, unearthly chorus of 'Erzulie' calling from within her own mind. Then she remembered no more until she 'came to' two or three hours later.



The *hungan* (voodoo priest) told her she had shown all the characteristics of being 'mounted by Erzulie' – the goddess had taken control of Maya Deren's actions in the way a skilled rider guides his horse. The analogy is misleading, however, for a horse retains its normal consciousness when being ridden, but devotees mounted by the Haitian *loa* enter a trance state in which they lose all consciousness of themselves and their surroundings.

Since the *hungan* assured Maya Deren that her behaviour during trance was typical of possession by Erzulie, and since the various *loa* always follow a predictable pattern of behaviour when they possess a devotee, it is fairly easy to deduce what Maya Deren did during her descent into 'the white darkness'. She would have begun by using the consecrated combs, soap, scent and other toilet articles that are kept in voodoo temples for the exclusive use of Erzulie. The grooming process completed, Erzulie (in the body of Maya Deren) would have decorated herself with the jewellery kept for her. This usually consists of a large selection of cheap, flashy costume jewellery; it always includes three wedding rings, as according to voodoo belief Erzulie has three husbands in addition to many lovers.

Queen for a day

Her toilet finished, Erzulie would have chosen from among the worshippers several handsome young men to act as her courtiers while she moved among the congregation, introducing herself to each member of it. She would shake hands with the men but extend only a finger to the women; Erzulie is not well-disposed towards members of her own sex, regarding them as sexual rivals.

Tired out by socialising, she would then either have demanded refreshments (iced cakes and sweet, fizzy alcoholic drinks are her particular favourites) or taken her ease in an armchair, basking in the admiration of her worshippers. In either case she would have behaved as though she was extremely happy, without a care in the world. Eventually, however, she would have begun to complain about something or other; the cakes were not sweet enough, perhaps, or her drink was insufficiently iced, or her chair was in an inconvenient position. Apologies from the worshippers would not have satisfied her; she would have asserted that nobody really loved her, and started to weep. Finally, in a storm of tears, she would have been led to a couch and fallen into a deep sleep – to awake as Maya Deren.

Maya Deren's experience of the trance state transformed her attitude towards voodoo. Instead of regarding it as a web of interesting superstitions, a bogus faith whose devotees performed choreographically appealing dances, she came to see it as an authentic religion, incorporating ethical values and a life style that she accepted as

being in many ways admirable. As she pointed out, voodoo (together with other religions in which spirit possession is a central feature) is qualitatively different from the great religions of Islam and Christianity. In these there is a sharp divide between creator and created: whereas the orthodox Christian claims to come close to the divine through the sacraments of the Church, and the Sufi mystic may believe he has enjoyed some contact with the divine, the voodoo devotee actually becomes a god or goddess and may also meet other divinities when they take possession of other worshippers.

The core of voodoo is a blend of African spirit religions brought to Haiti by slaves imported by the French plantation owners; the word voodoo is thought to be a corruption of *vodun*, which in the Fon language of West Africa means god, spirit, or 'sacred object'. However, over the two centuries or so during which voodoo has developed to its present form, the African core has been joined by other elements, notably popular Catholicism and degenerate European grimoire magic (see page 2204).

Above and left: these two pictures (taken six months apart and in different voodoo centres) show two separate devotees possessed by the same *loa*. Each exhibits the characteristic pose of the deity

Pictures of Catholic saints are found in most voodoo temples, where they are identified with individual voodoo gods and goddesses. The 'Virgin of the Sorrows', her heart pierced with swords, is identified with Erzulie; pictures of St Patrick, busily engaged in driving the snakes out of Ireland, are held to be portraits of Damballah, the serpent-god; while St John the Baptist is identified with Shango, a disagreeable African god of storm and thunder. This latter identification has probably arisen because due to special climatic conditions Haiti is often subject to violent storms in the days following the festival of St John the Baptist.

The Catholic Church in Haiti has fought a long, and largely unavailing, battle against voodoo, at times using the force of the civil power to conduct religious persecutions in which voodoo temples and magical implements have been destroyed. In spite of this the majority of the Haitian rural population remain convinced that there is a real connection between voodoo and Catholicism, and that the powers of voodoo and of Catholic priests in some way complement each other. As one voodoo believer told an anthropologist, 'The things of the Church are always affairs of magic.'

This belief has caused a lot of trouble for the Church in Haiti. The custodians of rural churches must be on constant guard against thefts of items such as holy water, consecrated candles and sacred images, since all these are believed by voodoo practitioners to be possessed of occult properties. Even the most sacred ceremonies and festivals of the Church have been made to serve as adjuncts to voodoo operations.

On one occasion, so it is reported, a bishop

Right: a voodoo priestess in ceremonial robes with the head of a billy goat enveloped in a red shirt. The billy goat is the traditional offering to Baron Samedi, master of black magic

of the Church was induced to hold a solemn funeral ceremony incorporating a requiem mass over a gilded coffin that he was led to believe was that of a dignitary from a remote part of the republic. As the ceremony proceeded an extraordinarily pungent odour, which was neither that of sanctity nor even that usually associated with decomposition, started to emanate from the coffin. The suspicious bishop suspended his officiations and demanded that the coffin should be opened. The mourners demurred and, when the bishop persisted, took to their heels: inside the coffin there proved to be a drugged, but very much alive, billy goat.

Voodoo believers attend many Church festivals, where they worship their own gods under a guise of devout Christianity. At the 'Festival of the Palms' – a Haitian Catholic festival held each July – the anthropologist Melville Herskovits reported that he witnessed 'Catholic pilgrims' being possessed by Erzulie, the serpent-god Damballah and even the sinister Baron Samedi, the lord of cemeteries and master of black magic. It is remarkable that worshippers of Baron Samedi should have taken part in a Catholic pilgrimage, for the Baron and his assistant Guédé are closely associated with the voodoo 'cult of the dead', to which the Church is particularly hostile on account of its resemblance to European necromancy.

In Haitian festivals Christian and voodoo elements are inextricably interwoven. The Christian voodoo devotee baptises both his children and his drums, worships deities that are in part Catholic saints, and makes frequent use of the sign of the cross

The cult of the dead is practised by only a minority of voodoo believers, and those who take part in its rites are sometimes held in awe tinged with fear by their neighbours. The most public manifestation of the cult takes place on All Souls' Day, when Baron Samedi's disciples, dressed in purple and black (the colours of mourning) flock to rural cemeteries and dance in honour of the Baron and his kingdom of death. This dance blends Eros and Thanatos (love and death) in a way that delights some Freudians. The dancers roll their eyes upwards like corpses, sing (in voices intended to imitate a death rattle) ballads of the utmost sexual grossness, and dance the *banda*, an imitation of human copulation that involves the dancers holding sticks in positions suggestive of erect male sexual organs.

Entities of death

This festival has two main functions. First, it provides the participants with an orgiastic relief from the grinding poverty and physical hardships of their everyday lives. Second, it provides them with the assurance that they are on good terms with the evil and dangerous entities associated with death.

There are many such evil creatures in Haitian folklore. The most notable, apart from the zombie, are the *loup-garou* and the *baka*. The *loup-garou* is a kind of vampire. It is female, usually red-haired, and has bloodshot eyes. During the day it appears to be an ordinary peasant woman: at night it slowly drains the life from its neighbours by sucking their blood. Unlike the European vampire, which is reputed to go for the throat, the *loup-garou* makes its incisions between its victims' toes. The *baka* are evil gods, or the spirits of black magicians, who transform themselves into animals and roam nocturnally in search of victims whom they devour.

One of the attractions of the voodoo religion is that its ceremonies are designed to protect the participants against evils such as these. But this is by no means its only appeal. Voodoo and other spirit religions, such as Candomblé in Brazil, number millions among their adherents, and it seems clear from their popularity that their common feature – the spiritual experience of being possessed by the gods while in a state of trance – satisfies some deep-rooted need of the human psyche.

Pagan and magic elements mingle in modern Brazil's spirit religions. See page 2506

Proof that a direct descendant of Christ lives in contemporary France depends on some mysterious documents that are housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. BRIAN INNES assesses their significance

A dossier of secrets

THOSE WHO SET OUT to investigate 'the Rennes controversy' very soon find themselves consulting a series of publications that have been lodged with the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The Bibliothèque Nationale is similar to the British Library in that it holds in its archives a copy of every work published in the country. At the same time it provides both a more and less reliable record of published works than does the British Library: by means of its *Dépôt légal* system it establishes a date of publication for copyright purposes for each work deposited, yet there is no necessity to show that any copy but the one deposited has ever been published.

The series of publications in the Bibliothèque Nationale that Henry Lincoln, Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent refer to in *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* as 'the Prieuré documents' show no sign of having been 'published' in the accepted meaning of the word. They are mostly duplicated typescripts, with a date of publication and an author, but there is no evidence of any other copies ever having turned up in a bookshop or library. The only copy is the one in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The earliest of the documents is entitled *Les descendants Mérovingiens ou l'énigme du Razès Wisigoth* ('The Merovingian descendants, or the enigma of Razès of the Visigoths'); its authorship is attributed to one Madeleine Blancasall, translated from the German by Walter Celse-Nazaire, and published in 1965 in Geneva under the imprint of the Grande Loge Alpina. The text traces the descent of the Merovingians from their alleged biblical origin to the 20th century, by way of the family of Plantard, and this genealogy is signed Henri Lobineau.

But there is more to this than meets the eye. Certain elements draw attention to themselves: the church of Rennes-le-Château is dedicated to the Magdalene, or Madeleine; the spring at Rennes-les-Bains known as the Madeleine is close to the confluence of the two rivers Blanque and Sals; the church of Rennes-les-Bains is dedicated to the two saints Celse and Nazaire; and the Grande Loge Alpina, the main lodge of Swiss Freemasonry, denies all knowledge of this work. Its provenance is therefore at the least obscure, if not suspect.

Nine months later, a second document was deposited with the Bibliothèque Nationale. It also purports to come from the Grande Loge Alpina: its title is *Un trésor Mérovingien à Rennes-le-Château*, and its author is Antoine l'Ermite. Here it is only necessary to point out that the grotto of St Antony the Hermit is to be found a mile or two from Rennes in the Galamus gorge.

The following month there appeared *Pierres gravées du Languedoc*, purportedly a reprint of a book published in 1884 by Eugene Stublein. Stublein certainly existed: in 1877 he published a *Description d'un voyage aux établissements thermaux de l'arrondissement de Limoux*, but there is no known copy of his supposed 1884 publication. It is in this book that there first appears a reproduction of the gravestone of Marie de Negri d'Ables (see page 164). In the records of the Bibliothèque Nationale the name of the depositor of this work is given as Antoine l'Ermite, his address a travellers' hotel in the 17th *arrondissement* of Paris.

In the spring of 1967 a further publication was deposited with the Bibliothèque Nationale. It is entitled *Le serpent rouge*, and three authors are named: Messieurs de

Above: a coin from the reign of King Dagobert II (651–679) who, most scholars believe, was the last of the Merovingian dynasty of regents of southern France. But there exist mysterious documents that purport to demonstrate that the Merovingian line did not, after all, end with the assassination of Dagobert in the forest of Woëvres (top) in the Ardennes region of eastern France. Instead, they claim, the present-day representative of the Merovingian line – also, they allege, the lineal descendant of Christ – lives in France. He was allegedly active in the election campaign that, in 1958, resulted in Charles de Gaulle (right) becoming president of France for the first time

Right: a statue of St Mary Magdalene in the parish church of Sainte-Madeleine – St Mary Magdalene – in Rennes-le-Château. One of the documents in the Bibliothèque Nationale that purports to establish the existence of the Prieuré de Sion is allegedly written by one Madeleine Blancasall – a pseudonym transparently derived from Sainte-*Madeleine,* which stands close to the rivers *Blanque* and *Sals*

Koker, Saint-Maxent and Feugère. There is some disagreement over the date of this work: the *Dépôt légal* – the date on which, after the necessary bureaucratic delay, the work was officially declared 'published' – is 20 March; the date on the deposition slip, according to Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent, is 17 January, but according to Franck Marie, who has investigated the matter closely, it is 15 February. But there is no doubt that Louis Saint-Maxent and Gaston de Koker were found hanged on 6 March, and Pierre Feugère the following day.

What is the explanation for this strange juxtaposition of events? Were the three men victims of a ghastly revenge, or did they agree to a suicide pact? Their families are unanimous on one point: that the three were apparently unacquainted with one another. The authors of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* briefly consider an alternative explanation, and then dismiss it: that some person, having found three suitable deaths reported in the French newspapers, added the three names to the title-page of the work and *then* deposited it at the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the all-too-likely expectation that the clerks of the *Dépôt légal* department would not notice that the date on the deposition slip had been falsified.

What kind of a plot is this? Two documents attributed to transparent pseudonyms and to a publisher that denies all knowledge of them; and a third, almost certainly falsely attributed to three authors who died unexpected deaths. A few months later the first 'proper' book on the treasure of Rennes was published by the very respectable house of Julliard. It was entitled *L'or de Rennes*, and its author was Gérard de Sède; it appeared the following year in paperback under the title *Le trésor maudit de Rennes*, and in a revised edition, under the Plon imprint, in 1977, with the title *Signé: Rose + Croix*. It was the paperback that first attracted Henry Lincoln's attention in 1969, and led him to make three programmes for BBC television: 'The lost treasure of Jerusalem' (1972), 'The priest, the painter and the Devil' (1974) and 'In the shadow of the Templars' (1979).

Danger: keep out!

It is to Gérard de Sède that we owe most of the information about Bérenger Saunière and the mystery of Rennes-le-Château that has been made public. It is to Gérard de Sède that we owe the allegation that it is dangerous to enquire too closely into matters connected with Rennes. He cites a Citroën, 'riddled with machinegun bullet holes' – but Lincoln and his collaborators discovered that this was an old wreck that had been used by a farmer's sons for a target! One feels that this could almost be a metaphor for de Sède's story: riddled with improbabilities as it is, it is the source of much dubious information.

Contemporary with the publication of *L'or de Rennes*, a document attributed to one Henri Lobineau was lodged at the Bibliothèque Nationale. This was entitled *Dossiers secrets*, and *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* describes it graphically:

> a thin, nondescript volume, a species of folder with stiff covers which contained a loose assemblage of ostensibly unrelated items – news clippings, letters pasted to backing-sheets, pamphlets, numerous genealogical trees and the odd printed page apparently extracted from the body of some other work. Periodically some of the individual pages would be removed. At different times other pages would be freshly inserted. On certain pages additions and corrections would sometimes be made in a minuscule longhand. At a later date, these pages would be replaced by new ones, printed and incorporating previous emendations.

The principal contents of the *Dossiers* were a series of genealogical trees, attributed to Henri Lobineau, and establishing one 'Pierre Plantard de St-Clair' as a direct lineal descendant of Dagobert II, who was assassinated in 679 and was not known to have had

any legitimate issue. Lobineau was obviously a pseudonym, derived from the Rue Lobineau near Saint-Sulpice in Paris, a church that also plays a significant part in the Rennes story. Papers in the *Dossiers* suggested that Lobineau was really an Austrian historian named Leo Schidlof, who had died in Switzerland the previous year; but Schidlof's daughter insists that he knew nothing of genealogy. Once again, a dead man's name was being used to give colour to something with which he had no connection.

Who, then, is this Pierre Plantard de St-Clair? As Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent rightly say, 'so far as release of information during the last twenty-five years or so was concerned, all trails seemed to lead ultimately to him.' It is difficult to put together a complete portrait of Pierre Plantard (the St-Clair appears to be a recent addition to his name), for he has deliberately remained elusive for most of his life.

His career appears to have begun in the French Resistance, where he edited a clandestine journal under the title of *Vaincre*, and he is said to have been imprisoned by the Gestapo from October 1943 until he was – presumably – liberated toward the end of 1944.

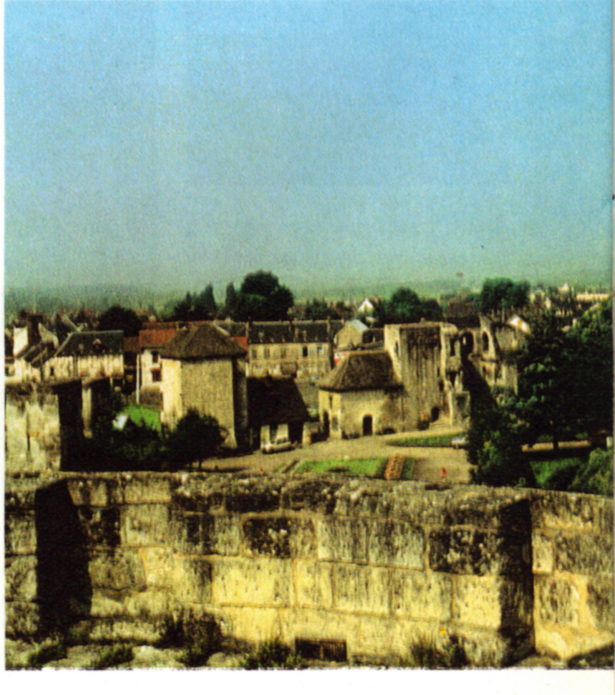
According to a character sketch written by his first wife Anne Lea Hisler, who died in 1971: 'invited in 1947 by the Federal Government of Switzerland, he resided for several years there, near Lake Léman, where numerous *chargés de missions* and delegates from the entire world are gathered.' Little more is known of Plantard's activities for a decade; then, in May 1958, when Algeria rose in revolt and Charles de Gaulle stood for the presidency of France, Plantard was engaged, with other prominent French citizens, in organising the 'Committees of Public Safety' that played an important part in de Gaulle's election.

Top: Pierre Plantard, allegedly the present successor to the Merovingian throne – and a direct descendant of Christ. His seal allegedly appears in a parchment of 1560. It is supported by two bears, interpreted by Philippe de Chérisey as 'the two celestial bears, Callisto and Arcas, with the polar circle and the fleur de lys representing the Pole Star'. This arcane description is unsupported by any source independent of the Prieuré documents. Whatever the significance of the seal, however, one thing is certain: Plantard's motto, *'Et in Arcadia ego'*, is intricately bound up with the original mystery of Rennes-le-Château

Next, we find M. Plantard editing a slim duplicated magazine entitled *Circuit*, and described as the organ of 'the Organisation for the Defence of the Rights and the Liberty of Low-Cost Homes'. The first series of *Circuit* was published between May and September 1956; the volumes deal largely with the drawing up and registration of the statutes of an unnamed society at Sous-Cassan, Annemasse, close to the Swiss border at Geneva. A second series of the magazine appeared in 1959, as the 'cultural periodical of the French Forces' Federation'; as might be expected, the published address of this organisation is a false one.

Then came *'l'affaire de Gisors'*. A certain Roger Lhomoy, a guide employed at the ancient castle of Gisors, reported in 1946 that he had carried out unauthorised excavations beneath the castle, and had discovered a subterranean chapel beneath the donjon, which contained 19 stone sarcophagi and 30 metal coffers. The local authorities, horrified by Lhomoy's work and the dangerous nature of the excavations, immediately closed them and forbade any further interference. Little more was heard of the matter until 1962, when Gérard de Sède published his first major work, *Les Templiers sont parmi nous* ('The Templars are among us'). He suggested that the subterranean chapel contained the legendary lost treasure of the Templars, and that the Order of Knights Templar still survived in France. He appears to have derived some of his information from Pierre Plantard.

The publication of de Sède's book brought about a demand that Lhomoy's excavation should be further investigated,



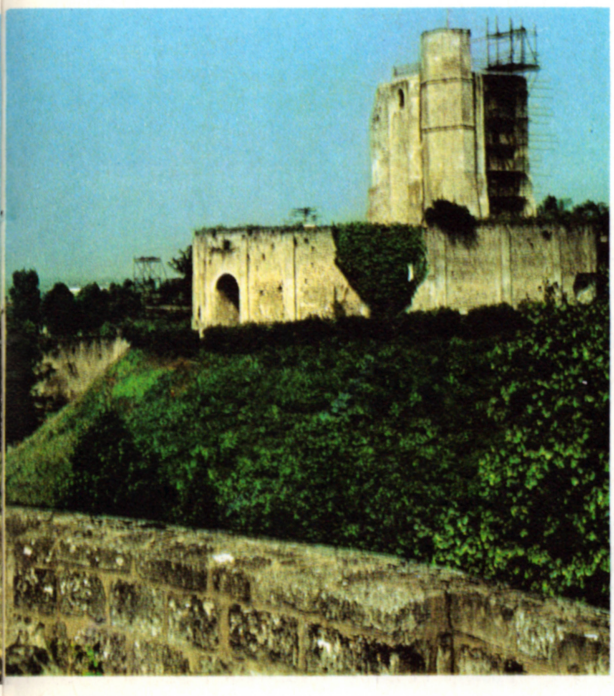
and for two years a strange see-saw of official policy took place. First the Minister for Cultural Affairs, André Malraux (who had also been involved in the formation of the Committees for Public Safety), sealed the excavation; then, six months later, he authorised further excavation; finally, in March 1964, he declared that the investigation had been directed 'to verify certain assertions concerning the presence of a treasure beneath the castle donjon. The excavations have been completed today. They have given a negative result.'

The gold of the temple

In an interview accorded in 1972 to Jean-Luc Chaumeil, Pierre Plantard is quoted:

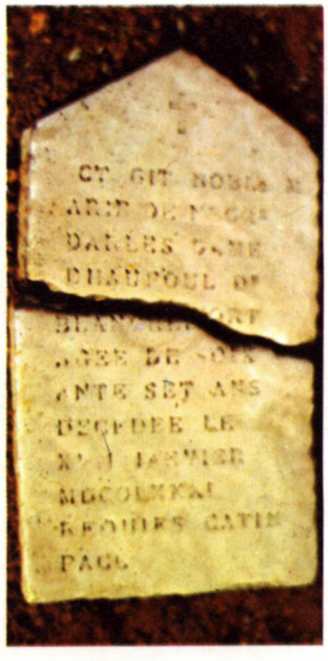
> I have said, and repeated many times, to Gérard de Sède: 'Why do you want to dig at Gisors? They were forced to camouflage the crypt for precisely the same reasons: the looting of the archives'. . . . Notice that in the matter of Gisors, I have never believed in a material treasure: there is no gold of the Temple. . . . The Order of the Temple disappeared in 1314. It has never been reconstituted; all the societies that pretend to derive from it (and there are many) derive purely and simply from the imagination of their founders. . . . There is a parallel branch: the Prieuré de Sion. . . . The society to which I belong has existed a very long time, it is very old. I myself am the successor of others, that is all. We guard certain things faithfully, and without any desire for publicity.

This was not the first mention of the Prieuré de Sion. De Sède had alluded cryptically to it in his book about Gisors; but for the most suggestive details we have to turn once more to the *Dossiers secrets*.



Left: the ancient castle of Gisors. In 1962 author Gérard de Sède suggested that an underground chapel that had been discovered in earlier excavations might hold the legendary lost treasure of the Templars – and that the Order of the Templars survived in France. There was, naturally enough, great public demand that the excavation be reopened. But official reaction was curiously complicated. The then French Minister for Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, intervened and first sealed the dig, then reopened it – and finally, in March 1964, announced: 'The excavations have been completed today. They have given a negative result'

Right: the line of zero longitude, used by the French before the Greenwich meridian was generally accepted in 1884, as it passes through the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Saint-Sulpice was apparently the centre of a 17th-century secret society, the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement – which, *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* argues, was a front for the Prieuré de Sion. Some writers find it significant that the tomb of Marie de Negri d'Ables (below) apparently lies on the same meridian



Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent have succinctly summarised the claims made in these documents. First, a secret order pre-dated the Knights Templar, who were created as its military and administrative arm. This order is most commonly known as the Prieuré de Sion. Its directors – or Grand Masters – have been people whose names are among the most illustrious in history.

Then, although the Templars were dissolved in the period from 1307 to 1314, the Prieuré de Sion remained untouched and has continued to the present day. It has played a significant part in contemporary international affairs. Its declared objective is the restoration of the Merovingian dynasty.

The Merovingian line itself, by direct descent from Dagobert II and his son Sigisbert IV (676–758), extends through intermarriage through Godfroi de Bouillon, who captured Jerusalem in 1099, to a wide range of noble and royal houses – Blanchefort, Gisors, Saint-Clair, Montesquieu, Montpézat, Phoer, Luisignan, Plantard (perhaps Plantagenet?) and Habsburg-Lorraine.

These are bold claims, and Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent base the complex thesis of their book firmly upon them. It is essential to look further into them.

Who are the mysterious Grand Masters of the Prieuré de Sion? See page 2514

Ghosts of the air

A Wellington bomber regularly flies along the Towy valley in Dyfed, Wales, and has been seen by many people – but no such aeroplanes are in use now. FRANK SMYTH reviews the many stories of phantom aircraft and their crews

SOMETIMES IN THE GOLDEN DAYS of late summer, the unmistakable whine of a well-tuned Merlin engine is heard over Biggin Hill airfield in Kent. To older hands at this Royal Air Force training establishment, as well as to pilots at the Biggin Hill Flying Club, the evocative noise means only one thing: a Spitfire fighter. And many of those who glance upwards catch the flash of sunlight on an elliptical wing as the aircraft performs a 'victory' roll over the field before melting into the far haze, its exhausts leaving a rattle of sound in its wake.

In 1940, during the Battle of Britain, RAF Biggin Hill was one of the most famous front line bases. From here, Supermarine Spitfires and Hawker Hurricanes flew out to break German air power and thus deflect the threat of invasion. But the last operational Spitfire left Biggin Hill in the early 1950s. So what is the aircraft seen at Biggin Hill? Can it be the apparition of a wartime pilot flying his spectral aeroplane back home several decades too late? According to an RAF spokesman: 'Too many rational people have reported it for it to be a hoax, and it's certainly not another make of aeroplane that has been mistaken for a Spitfire.' The craft has been identified as a Mark II which, together with the Mark I, flew from Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain. Both are now extremely rare.

Significantly the ghost Spitfire is most frequently seen in the late afternoon and early evening, when the wartime squadrons usually came in from their last sortie of the day. And the 'victory' roll may be another significant point, for several inexperienced fliers lost their lives while performing the stunt.

Whatever the story behind the flying ghost of Biggin Hill, it is far from unique. Since the infancy of aeronautics, phantom aeroplanes and their pilots have featured in paranormal events. Perhaps this is because airmen have such a special feeling for their aircraft. To them, some are lucky craft, others are jinxed.

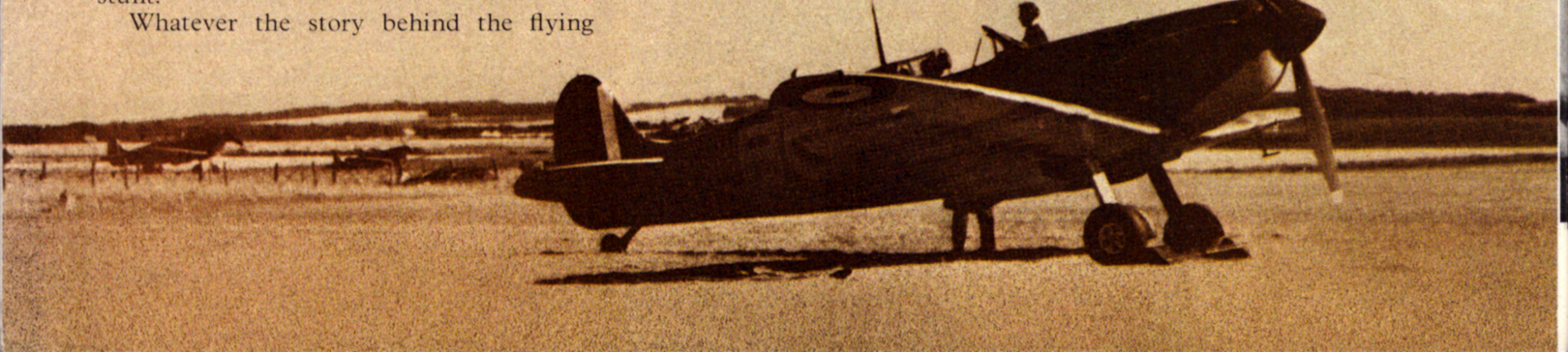
It was in the officers' mess of a remote RAF station in India that a name was first put to aerial jinxes. In 1938 a squadron of Wellesley bombers suffered a rash of minor accidents – inexplicably, fuel pipes became clogged, instruments behaved erratically and cables snapped. The mess boasted only one book, Grimm's *Fairy tales*, and the only beer available was Fremlin's ale. From these two sources the pilots coined a name for the power that 'spooked' their craft: the 'gremlin'.

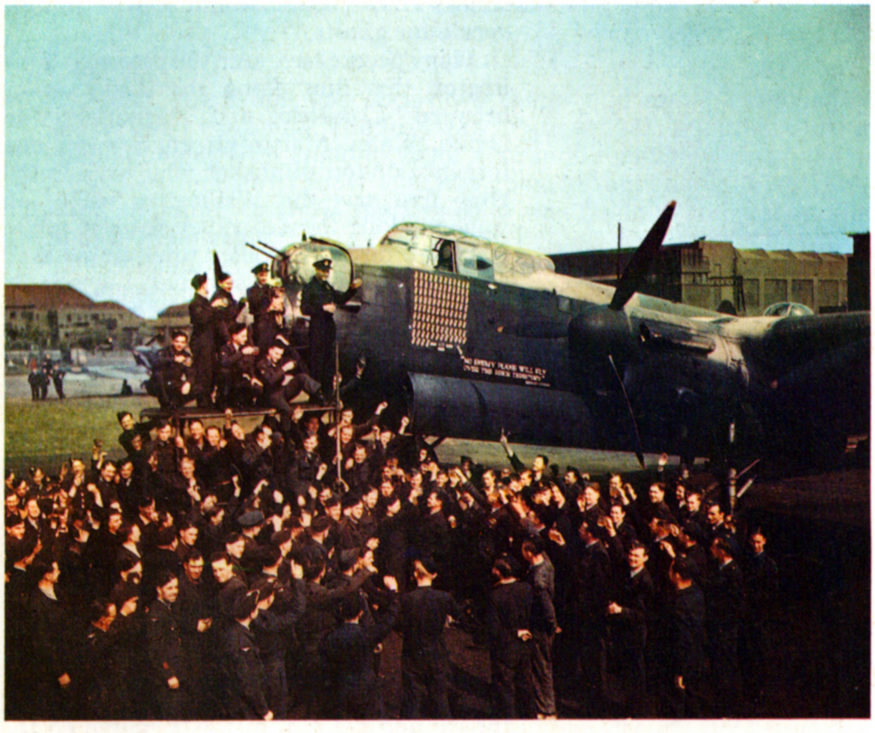
Later, during the war, crews aboard the big four-motor bombers such as the Lancaster and Halifax began to speak of lucky and unlucky gremlins, treating them as guardian spirits of the aircraft. Squadron Leader Bob Grainger of Garmouth in Morayshire, who flew Spitfires in the Battle of Britain, is a keen student of the paranormal and has his own theories on this.

An aircraft is a large but sensitive piece of equipment, and in a fighting aircraft men experience a great deal of violent

The Spitfire is best known for its heroic role in the Battle of Britain in 1940. The last operational Spitfire flew in the early 1950s – yet a ghostly version still performs the 'victory' roll over Biggin Hill airfield in Kent

Right: a 'gremlin', the creature held responsible by RAF men during the Second World War for 'spooking' – or 'jinxing' – certain aircraft





Above: the famous Lancaster bomber *S for Sugar*, with 467 Squadron, after 100 successful missions. Now a major attraction at the RAF museum at Hendon, London, it appears that ghostly airmen have been sitting in the gun turrets. Were 467 Squadron so emotionally bound up with the aircraft that they simply cannot bear to leave it?

> emotion. Long before the Canadian 'Philip' experiment, where a group of psychical researchers deliberately conjured up a table-rapping spirit [see page 1021], I wondered whether something similar could not be created in a particular aeroplane. If a certain Lancaster, for instance, had got you to Berlin and back intact on several occasions, you would begin to feel confidence in it, and that confidence might well affect the crew's performance – the pilot would fly better, the gunners aim more accurately, and so on. But in many instances it seems to have been more than a simple matter of psychology. When a new crew took over a 'lucky' bomber, the unusual luck continued for them, too.

In such cases, suggests Grainger, perhaps man and machine become such an integral whole that in the event of a sudden, fatal crash they continue to exist together on another level.

The most famous flying ghosts of all are centred, appropriately enough, at the Royal Air Force museum at Hendon in north London. Here, in two vast old hangars and one modern building, are Spitfires and their adversaries the Messerschmidt ME 110s, Tempests, Typhoons and many other old and new aircraft. Nearby, in RAF Hendon itself, is the Bomber Command museum containing such rarities as the Mosquito fighter-bomber, the last surviving Wellington and the Avro Lancaster *S for Sugar* with its battle honours emblazoned on its lofty nose.

For years, long before the Hendon museums opened in the 1970s, the sound of an erratic petrol engine had been heard puttering towards the two hangars. Group Captain Bill Randall, a director of the museum since its inception, discovered that a certain Lieutenant Shepherd had crashed and died in his trainer aeroplane here in 1917. Randall comments:

> Perhaps Lieutenant Shepherd was responsible for the first 'happening', but I'm frankly at a loss to explain some of the other occurrences here. Of course, in buildings of this size and age, temperature differences, especially when the building is cooling at night, cause odd bumps and cracks. But a whole range of specific noises have been heard, from footsteps to the sound of engine cowlings being lifted off – when, of course, they haven't actually been moved. We've had night watchmen run in panic from the building.

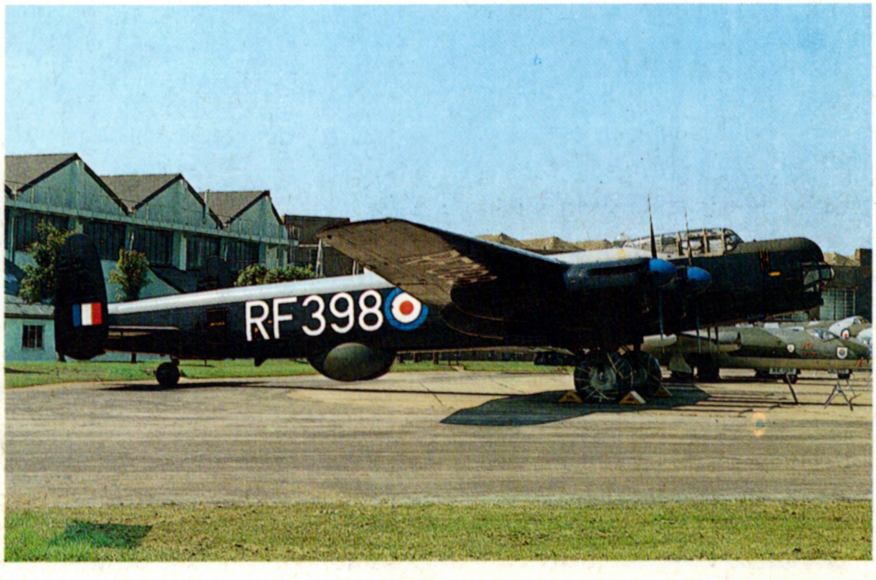
S – for survival?

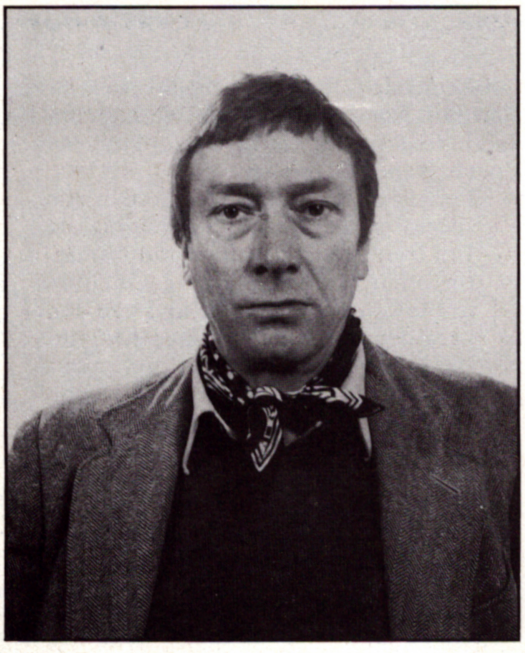
Most sinister and dramatic of all is the haunting of *S for Sugar*. Built in 1943, the big bomber flew a record 125 missions to Germany in three years, making her one of the most famous fighting aircraft in the world. Now, it seems, her old crew are reluctant to leave her. Says Randall: 'On a number of occasions, people working inside her have reported seeing chaps in World War II flying kit sitting in the gun turrets. One researcher who had wanted to look over her scrambled out immediately and wouldn't go back.'

The ghosts of Hendon have been so insistent that Randall has turned them to good use. A special tape, featuring some of the weird noises, plus interviews with staff who have had 'experiences', can be heard by visitors for a small charge. It seems appropriate that the 'spirit airmen' should help pay for the upkeep of their old aircraft.

Another set of ghosts haunts an Avro Lincoln at RAF Cosford near Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, which is rather strange because, as Randall points out, the

Below: an Avro Lincoln that is said to be haunted – which is odd, for that particular aeroplane never saw active service





Left: Martin Green, a writer who was amazed to see a Wellington bomber flying down the Towy valley in Dyfed, Wales, in 1979. He could see it quite clearly: its propellers were spinning, and its slipstream bent the tops of trees as it passed by – but it made no sound at all. Green then realised that it was highly unlikely that Wellington bombers were still flying and later discovered that the only one left in Britain is in the RAF museum at Hendon (below). Some weeks after this experience, Green and another writer, Judith Cook, saw the Wellington again in the same valley. Another couple stopped to watch it; all four witnesses noted the complete silence of its flight. Aircraft of this type flew training missions in that area during the Second World War – and it seems that this one, at least, is still doing so

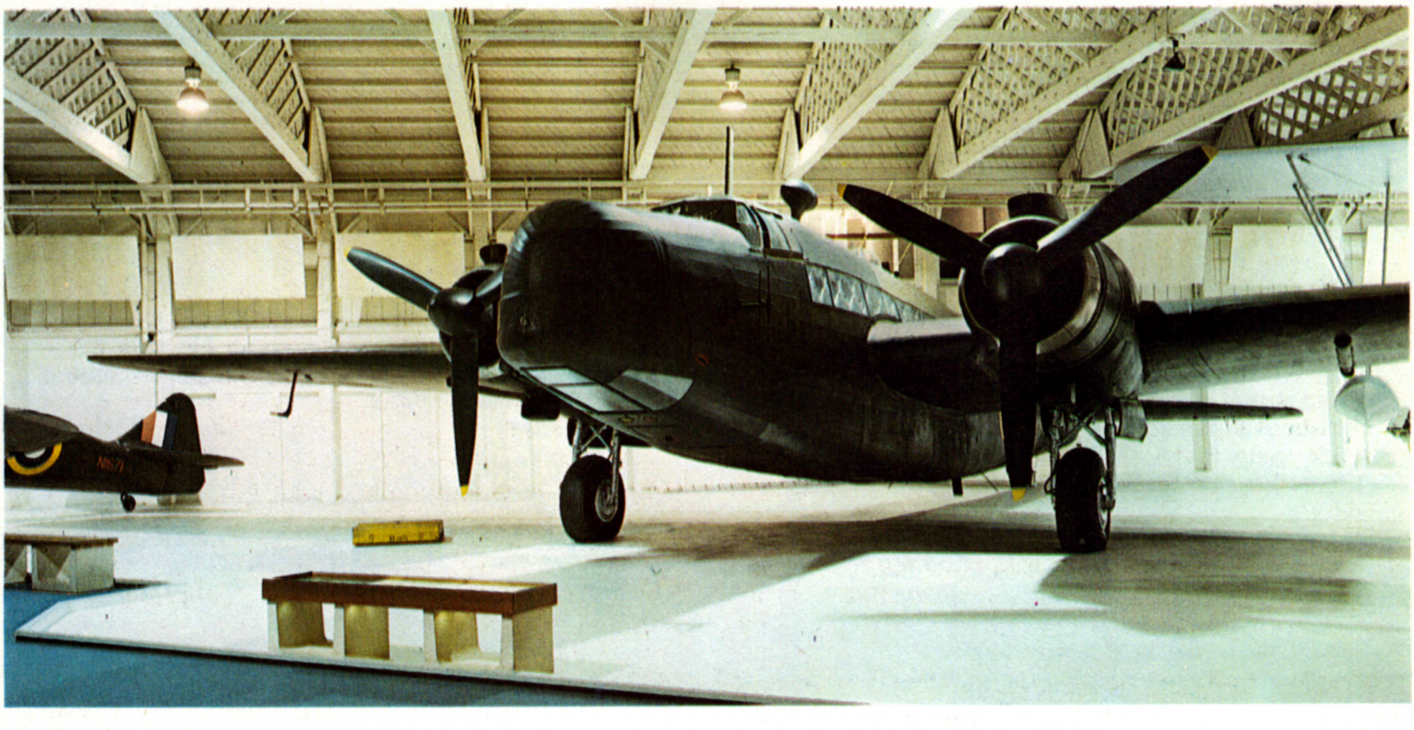
Lincoln never saw active service. Cosford houses the RAF's reserve aircraft, under the curatorship of former Flight Lieutenant Derek 'Clint' Eastwood. But, unlike Randall, Eastwood is reluctant to talk about a possible haunting. 'Extra' crew members have been seen in the Lincoln, he admits, but beyond this he will not go. 'I don't pretend to understand these things, and I'd prefer to leave them be,' he says. 'Let me just say that when people have pried into them, unpleasant things have happened here. On one occasion we did allow a television crew to film the aeroplane. They were being a little humorous about it when their camera was picked up and hurled across the hangar – no one was near it at the time. They packed up and left. Now I'd prefer that Cosford was simply known as an aircraft museum, not a centre for ghosts.'

Many people have seen the phantom Wellington that flies along the Towy valley between Llandeilo and Llandovery in Dyfed, Wales. Martin Green, a writer and former London publisher who lives in the area, first saw the Wellington while out walking along the A40 valley road in 1979.

> It flew down the valley towards me at tree top level, but although the propellers were spinning it made no sound. I could clearly see the wind bending the trees in its slipstream. I thought it rather odd that a Wellington should still be flying around. . . . I mentioned the sighting in my local pub, and two or three people said they'd seen it. But I made further enquiries and discovered, of course, that the only Wellington still intact in Britain is in the RAF museum, Hendon.

Some weeks after his first sighting, Green was driving up the valley with journalist Judith Cook when they saw the mystery craft flying silently towards them. They stopped the car and got out, just as a couple on the opposite side of the road pulled up to watch too. 'All four of us saw the aircraft,' said Green. 'The other driver, a middle-aged man, remarked that it was a Wellington bomber. But when it had flown off around a bend in the valley, he suddenly realised that it couldn't be, as there were no flying Wellingtons left. I think he was shocked by the idea of seeing a ghost.'

Wellington bombers did train over the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountain area around the Towy valley during the Second World War. But it is quite certain that there are no Wellingtons there now – at least, no physical ones.



Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
I should like to tell you about two rather odd experiences I have had. The first was in about 1971. I was shopping in Richmond when a strange feeling came over me, as if I knew what was going to happen next; I seemed to know that someone was going to hurt themselves.

I became worried that a member of my family would be hurt, but I looked at each of them and the strange feeling did not seem so strong. However, when I looked at the passers-by, the feeling became intense. Suddenly a middle-aged lady tripped on the pavement and fell over. As soon as she hit the ground I felt 'normal' again.

My second weird experience was in the form of a dream. Two days before the opening of a club for the mentally handicapped, with which I was involved, I dreamed that a small boy named Jamie rushed into the dining room and grabbed hold of a jug of orange squash. I took the jug from him before he could pull it over, shouting at him at the same time.

On the day the club opened, I was in the dining room when Jamie rushed in and grabbed the jug. It was just as in my dream and, perhaps most intriguing of all, Jamie was wearing exactly the same clothes as he had been in my dream.
Yours faithfully,
A. J. McKay Kingston, Surrey

Dear Sir,
I read with interest your article 'Brief encounter' [in issue 108] as something along very similar lines happened to me.

At my father's funeral in May 1981 I was talking to my brothers, whom I had not seen for two years, when one of them mentioned the fact that my cousin had died. I was surprised to hear this as not long before (in about February or March) I had spoken to him in the local bookmaker's; I remembered the occasion well as he had given me a tip for a horse and it had won at 8–1.

My brother insisted, however, that this was impossible – that my cousin had died in July 1980. Yet I know that I saw him after that time. When the horse he had told me about won its race, I turned to look for my cousin, but could not find him. I thought nothing of this at the time: he had always been a shy and retiring person and I assumed he had simply left the office, preferring not to say goodbye.

I wonder, had I known at the time that my cousin was dead, would I have still seen him?
Yours faithfully,
T. J. McClarnon Halifax, West Yorkshire

Dear Sir,
At about 9 p.m. one evening in 1967 I was outside looking up at the night sky when I saw a blue light travelling at a fantastic speed towards the Earth. I thought it would burn up, like a meteor, but instead it slowed down and changed to a whitish colour. Then it made a sharp turn at about 200 feet [60 metres] up and immediately changed colour again, this time to a brilliant ruby red. It headed north, emitting a bright red glow as it slowly descended.

Two days after this incident, I was on my way to work just before 8 a.m. and stopped at the newsagent's as usual. As I leaned my bicycle against the wall I was approached by a stranger, who held out his hand to me and said something that sounded like: 'I am Afreder; I am from the saucer people, you understand.' I turned away from him, but he followed me and declared, in a much firmer tone, 'You understand.'

By this time I had reached the door of the shop and decided that I would speak to the man. However, when I turned, he was nowhere to be seen.

The stranger had elf-like features, with high cheek bones and a pointed chin; he was about 5 feet 9 inches [1.7 metres] tall and had what seemed to me a rather feminine build; his voice was deep and guttural.

As I resumed my journey to work I realised that my right hand was tingling, as if I had pins and needles; it was very painful whenever I touched something cold, and remained so for several weeks.

Another, possibly related, incident occurred several months later. I had spent the evening at my local club and, after saying goodbye to two friends in the car park, I left to walk the short distance home at about 11 p.m. The next thing I knew I was standing outside my home. The tingling sensation had returned, but this time it was in my left arm. I went inside and to my astonishment my wife rather crossly asked me where I had been as it was 2.15 a.m. I have no idea where I was in those missing hours, but I do know that *something* extraordinary happened.
Yours faithfully,
W. Churn Farnborough, Hants

Dear Sir,
I think I have had what is known as a timeslip, although – like many ostensible paranormal phenomena – it was perhaps trivial.

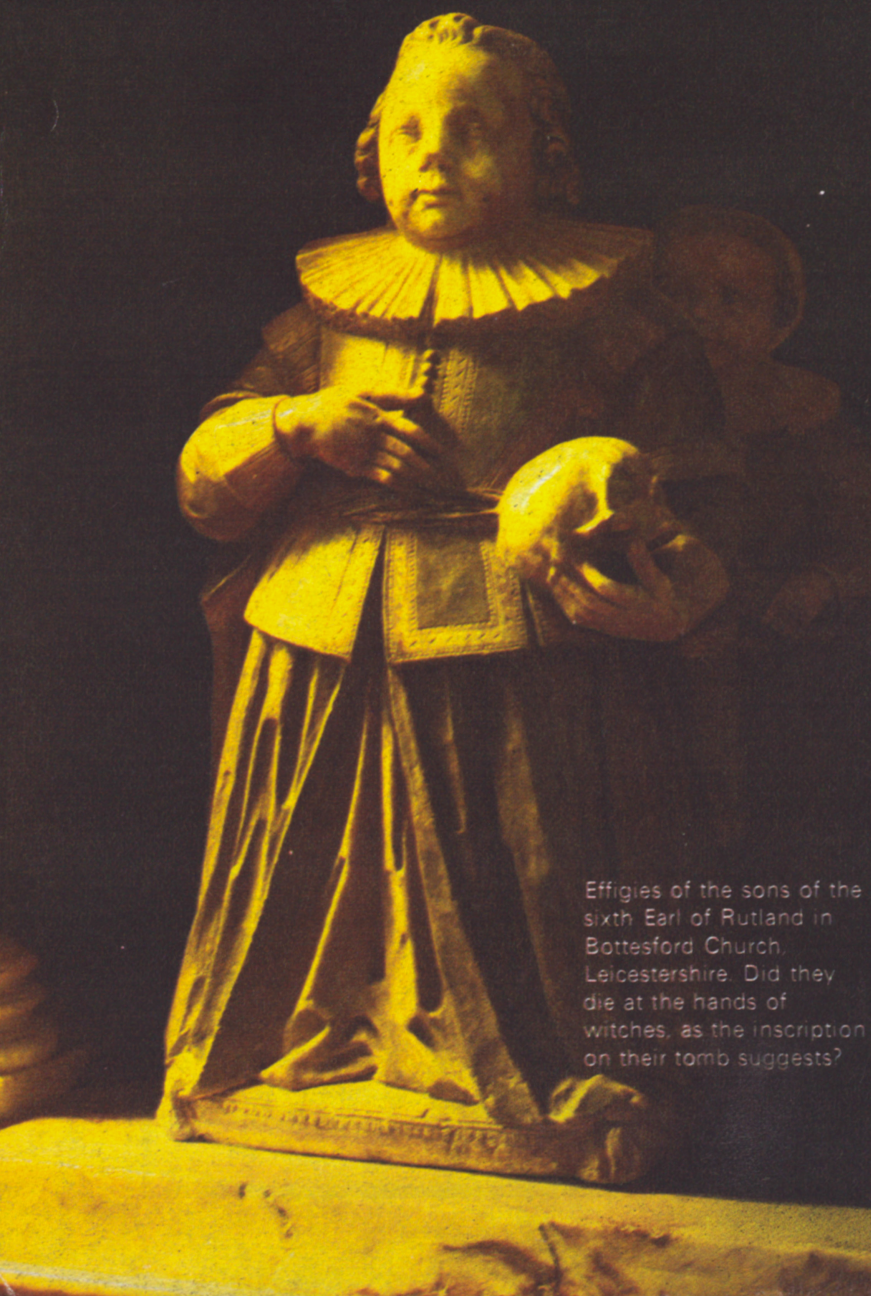
I was walking up a side street in Covent Garden, London, at about 8.45 a.m. one day in early autumn 1982, when I saw a young man running in my direction. I noticed him particularly because he seemed wild-eyed and was panting heavily, as if he were being chased – but there was no one following him at all. For some reason I took in his details: he was wearing soiled overalls, had curly, rather dirty blond hair, and was about 26. As he drew level with me our eyes met briefly – he seemed to be afraid of something, but I honestly don't think it was me!

The young man dashed past me and disappeared behind a parked van. I had walked on only a few yards when I saw the same young man turn the corner at the top of the street and come running towards me – again. It was the same person and the same incident in every detail – yet there was no way the man could have doubled back to the top of the street in the time I took to walk that short distance.

I often think about that young man and wonder who he was and what he was running from. But the more I think about it, the more it seems that the incident simply must have been some kind of timeslip. Like Sir William Crookes, I feel like saying: 'I didn't say it was possible, I said it happened!'
Yours faithfully,
Anna Petherbridge Richmond, Surrey

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Murders, mysteries and miracles



Effigies of the sons of the sixth Earl of Rutland in Bottesford Church, Leicestershire. Did they die at the hands of witches, as the inscription on their tomb suggests?

Some of the exciting new series starting soon in *The Unexplained*

The 'witches' of Bottesford
The sons of the sixth Earl of Rutland died 'by wicked practice and sorcerye' according to the inscription on the family tomb. And two 'witches' were hanged for the crime. What really happened? **See issue 126**

Shaman or charlatan?
George Ivanovich Gurdjieff devoted much of his life to the search for an ancient secret wisdom that would give him miraculous, superhuman powers. To his dedicated pupils he was indeed some kind of god. But to others he was a charlatan, exploiting his disciples for his own ends. **See issue 126**

Angels on the 'scope
Can radar solve the mystery of the UFOs? Certainly the radar beam encounters many mysterious objects in the skies. The complex problems of interpreting these 'angels' are explained in **issue 127**

Who discovered America?
Was Christopher Columbus really the first European to find America? Tantalising archaeological clues suggest the existence of trading links between the two continents as early as 1000 BC. **See issue 128**

A carbon copy killing
Two girls with the same birth date, murdered in the same place on the same day, 157 years apart – and in each case the accused was named Thornton. But there were other, even more astonishing parallels, as we reveal in **issue 129**

The living miracles
Miracle cures of many of the worst 'ills that flesh is heir to' are often reported by those who have prayed to, or even met, saints or visionaries. But how many of these 'miracles' were due to the power of faith – the ability to heal oneself? **See issue 130**

Where are all the others?
We do not know if life exists at all elsewhere in the Universe, let alone intelligent life – but perhaps our most sophisticated equipment is simply too primitive to detect it. And aliens could have been observing us for years, while we look in vain for them. **See issue 130**

The secret lives of the Ripper
Was the Victorian murderer in fact Madame Blavatsky, or a black magician who killed – and ate – his victims in order to become invisible? Or perhaps he was part of a Masonic plot? We review some of the occult theories about the Ripper's identity in **issue 131**